"Roma Responses to Recent Challenges: Roma Political Parties in the Times of Crisis"

Balázs Dobos

(Institute for Minority Studies, Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences)

< dobos.balazs@tk.mta.hu, balazs.dobos@gmail.com >

Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), Södertörn University, 4-5 December 2014

WORK IN PROGRESS.

Introduction[1]

The complex issues of the socio-economic inclusion of by far one of the largest minority groups in Europe, the Roma[2], including the improvement of their health status, housing and living conditions, education, employment, as well as of the access to social and other services, and the combat against discrimination and prejudices have been among the major challenges facing both new EU member-states and other non-member countries in Central and South Eastern Europe, in particular since the fall of Communism and the transition to market economies. Moreover, over the past decades, the issue has been receiving the growing attention of the international community as well, including the EU and its old member states, has provoked policy responses and proposals, and eventually resulted in the adoption of the EU Roma Strategy.

Drawing on Nancy Fraser's influential distinction between claims for redistribution and recognition (2003), many point out that Roma face both types of social inequalities, including most notably the unfavourable socio-economic situation and the high level of ethnic discrimination, that typically arise in the Post-Communist period in the region. The two types of issues–redistribution and recognition–are often referred as two sides of the same coin, which are closely intertwined, yet and especially in the case of Roma they can often be rival and even conflicting values, too. It is obviously closely linked to the contested issues of how "Roma" and their identities should be understood and shaped, how their situation should be tackled with particular regard to both the internal heterogeneity and the multiple and often conflicting narratives and criteria that have prevailed in identifying Roma communities as a national or ethnic minority, as a social group (what is known as 'ethnoclass' or 'underclass'), or as a transnational nation (Gheorghe 2013: 81, Marushiakova-Popov 2005, Vermeersch 2003: 890). The questions whether advancing inclusionary or exclusionary objectives and practices, putting more stress on socio-economic integration or ethnocultural preservation represent long-term challenges: a narrow approach that focuses more on addressing poverty would necessarily downplay ethnocultural issues, while the minority rights approach would not only further ethnicize some strictly social issues but it is eventually unable to effectively tackle them.

[1] This paper was supported by the János Bolyai Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
[2] In the text I use the term 'Roma' to denote not only a multifaceted category and a meta-group encompassing different sub-groups but a complex social and political construct comprised of (and externally associated with) diverse characteristics. For the sake of the analysis, those cases are also included where Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians are recognized as distinct entities.

Since the end of the 2000s, the complex socio-economic integration has been the dominant approach to improving the situation of Roma (Rövid 2012: 9), but the conditions and prospects of this desired integration, however, could not be improved considerably, and in certain respects even worsened during and after the financial crisis. This latter, aside from the Baltic republics, hit hard even the most vulnerable countries in the region (Connolly 2012, Sanfey 2011), most prominently Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria where significant Roma population lives. A great deal of reports and studies have highlighted how the outbreak and consequences of the global economic crises have added further challenges to the traditionally marginalized Roma in at least two critical aspects (see, for instance, Council of Europe 2013). First, Roma are particularly exposed to the intended and unintended consequences of crisis management, namely to the rise of unemployment, and to governmental austerity measures, including the curtailment in public sector and social security expenditures, which lead for many, to greater impoverishment and social exclusion. Second, while earlier the EU accession apparently brought the resurgence of radical parties in the region, they mostly had modest support (Vachudova 2008), later the economic downturn not only fuelled widespread anti-Roma sentiments but populist and radical right narratives could scapegoat traditional minority, religious and migrant communities for the recession, which factors deepened the tensions, led to increased discrimination and hostility, and even attacks against members of these groups, and eventually contributed to the electoral breakthrough of Jobbik in Hungary, Golden Dawn in Greece, and the success of Marián Kotleba's People's Party at the 2013 regional elections in Slovakia.

For the above reasons, the traditional underrepresentation and lack of significant participation of Roma in the policy arena, especially in those decision-making processes that crucially affect their lives have been of concern to many, and probably gained even more importance in recent years than before. Although since the fall of the Communist regimes there have been several and often rival institutional arrangements established through which Roma might participate and attempt to influence policy-making (see, for instance, Pajic 2012), many point out that despite a slight improvement, neither the rapid rise in the formation of civic organizations especially in the 1990s, the concluded pre-election, coalition, and other types of cooperation agreements between Roma and non-Roma actors, mainstream parties (e. g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia), nor the reserved seats in the parliaments (Kosovo, Romania) and the exemptions from certain requirements of the electoral system (Serbia) were sufficiently enough to change the overall picture, that Roma still remain

underrepresented at various levels. In many cases, Roma sought political influence by establishing Roma political parties and contesting the elections but as ordinary parties they mostly failed to win seats in legislatures. Furthermore, the wide array of different types of organizations in many cases led to the question of legitimacy, and made it even more challenging to answer who can represent and speak on behalf of Roma (Rostas 2012: 4). The widely assumed failure of Roma mobilization in the region is especially striking when taking into account that from statistical and demographic point of view, Roma constitute sizeable parts of the voting age population in many countries. Therefore, the primary focus of the literature has been on identifying and assessing the conditions and barriers to wide-ranging Roma involvement (e. g. Barany 2002, Klímová 2002, McGarry 2009, 2010, Sobotka 2001, Vermeersch 2003).

A further problem is that according to various survey results it seems that only a smaller part of Roma NGOs operate at the local level, and as a consequence, national and transnational activities can build on local experiences and knowledge only to a limited extent (Kóczé 2012). In addition, it has been demonstrated that although the recent EU Roma Strategy could be attributed to a number of factors, but hardly to the wide-scale activism and lobbying of the Roma themselves (Ram 2010), suggesting that most Roma actors are seemingly less interested in both gaining attention and focusing on the international bodies, but at both local and national levels they remain less influential, too (Kostadinova 2011).

The need for greater civil society participation and providing channels to make their voice heard is not only advocated by most theories of democracy, which conventionally find that getting more people involved in politics implies a greater number of opinions and preferences to be considered, and this in turn leads to better representation and to increased civic consciousness and loyalty, but the criteria is also expressed by the recent EU documents on Roma inclusion and by the mostly non-binding instruments of the international minority protection system. However, relatively little attention has been paid on how Roma identify and perceive themselves in the political structures, how they seek to draw boundaries, to mobilize support, and to define collective interests and objectives. Also, less attention has been paid on the main features of one of the possible institutional channels, on those of the more than 180 registered Roma political parties that have been established and registered since the transition (*see Table below*).

Table: The preliminary number of Roma (and Ashkali, Egyptian) political parties in Central and South Eastern Europe

Country	Number of parties
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1 (2003)[3]
Bulgaria	~ 25 (~ 2005)[4]
Croatia	~ 5 (1990-)[5]
Czech Republic	12 parties and movements (1990-)[6]
Greece	1 (2006-)[7]
Hungary	~ 32 (1989-)[8]
Kosovo	5 (2001-)[9]
Macedonia	~ 10 (1990-)[10]
Moldova	1 (2010-)[11]
Romania	~ 37 parties and political associations (1990-)[12]
Serbia	~ 31 parties and alliances (1990-)[13]
Slovakia	~ 24 parties and movements (1990-)[14]

Though not only their high number is particularly remarkable but they are often unique that make them hard to conceptualize besides the very fact how challenging it is for political scientists to approach the issues related to Roma participation and representation. Particularly since the very logic of party formation as well as the nature of party competition with their attempts to mobilize and unify the electorate, to reshape the political landscape, to reconstitute

[3] ACFC/SR (2004) 001. Report Submitted by Bosnia and Herzegovina Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. 36. http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_1st_SR_BiH_en.pdf (accessed 12 March 2014).
[4] Hajdinjak 2008: 119. Marushiakova-Popov 2001.
[5] Croatian Information-Documentation Referral Agency. IMENIK stranaka registrinanih u RH od 1990. godine. http://www.hidra.hr/politicke_stranke/imenik_stranaka_registriranih_u_rh_od_1990_godine (accessed 2 February 2014).
[6] Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic. Seznam politických stran a hnutí. http://aplikace.mvcr.cz/seznam-politickych-stran/Default.aspx (accessed 5 February 2014)
[7] New Roma Party (6 January 2006). http://thisisnotmycountry.blogspot.hu/2006/01/new-roma-party.html (accessed 30 October 2014)
[8] Dobos 2013: 290-291. National Office for the Judiciary. Civil Szervezetek Névjegyzéke. http://birosag.hu/allampolgaroknak/tarsadalmi-szervezetek-es-alapitvanyok-nevjegyzeke (accessed 12 March 2014).
[9] Central Election Commission. Regjistri i Partive Politike. http://www.kqz-ks.org/sq/zyra-per-rppc (accessed 9 February 2014).
[10] See especially Demirova-Abdulova 2005.
[11] Roma creating a party (Infotag, 18 June 2010) http://www.azi.md/en/print-story/12128 (accessed 12 November 2013).
[12] CEDIMR-SE Report: The Roma of Romania http://adatbank.transindex.ro/html/cim_pdf452.pdf Cadastru online - Instituţiile minorităţilor naţionale http://www.adatbank.ro/regio/ispmn/institutii/?oldal=orgMinlrom%C4%83 (accessed 12 March 2014).
[13] Ministry of Justice and Public Administration. Izvod iz registra političkih stranaka http://www.mpravde.gov.rs/register-parties.php (accessed 8 February 2014). Projekat „Stanje političke zajednice Roma u Srbiji" Beograd, 2009.
[14] Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic. Register of Parties http://www.ives.sk/registre/zoznamps.do (accessed 6 February 2014).

political identities, and to formulate collective demands, can contribute to the better understanding of Roma realities. Despite their weak electoral support, little is known not only about how they perform as political parties at all but also about how they identify and seek to mobilize, and about the solutions and alternatives they offer to the problems of Roma who are hit hard by the global economic crisis, too.

Albeit Roma have received national or ethnic minority status in the countries of the region, and consequently, the prevailing literature typically refers to them as ethnopolitical parties (e. g. Bugajski 1995), one can raise doubts about whether they can be completely members of an ethno(regional) party family. Roma parties in fact can adopt different mobilization strategies and compete on sharply different perceptions of the present, of social boundaries and identities, and on different visions for the community's future. Key to our understanding is whether Roma actors and parties themselves tend to mobilize support on ethnic grounds and/or on crucial socio-economic issues affecting their lives, advocate Roma nation-building, or appeal across ethnic lines, and target non-Roma voters. Overall, a lot depends on whether they advance redistribution and/or recognition claims, stand for assimilation, social integration without giving up certain features, or they seek to reinforce cultural separatism. Moreover, the different interpretations may easily result in undermining and questioning the grounds and necessity of Roma party politics, too.

To address the issues above, the paper is divided into two main parts. The following section primarily concentrates on the underlying, rather theoretical challenge that Roma political parties pose, and which will be explored through the guiding questions of whether and to what extent the main findings on European ethnic and partly ethnoregional parties are generally transferable to Roma contexts, assess the extent to which they can be applied to Roma parties and why the very idea of party politics may be fundamentally disputed in their case. By limiting the scope of the study the paper primarily concentrates on those parties that are recognized as such under national legislation[15], and secondly, it draws on the definition of ethnic parties developed by Ishiyama and Breuning (2011: 227) who find that in these cases, the majority of both party leaders and voters identify themselves as belonging to a non-dominant ethnic group, and the party name often indicates this affiliation, too.[16] Drawing on

[15] In some cases, therefore, political alliances and movements could be included as well.
[16] However, Roma parties from Bulgaria and Romania do not always fall completely into this definition: in Bulgaria, due to the constitutional ban that restricted the creation of ethnic parties especially over the 1990s (Vassilev 2004: 43-44), Roma parties have tended to adopt neutral names that do not refer to ethnicity, and in Romania, since the middle of the 1990s, according to changes in legislation most minority parties have no longer been registered as political parties, and the Roma

interviews, media and party document analysis, the second part with a comparative outlook to other countries takes the analysis further by illustrating how Roma parties in Hungary identify and mobilize Roma, how they respond to recent political and economic challenges, especially those from the far right, and whether they advance redistribution and/or recognition goals– examples of cases that have not been deeply analysed yet.

The Challenge of Roma Political Parties

Roma party politics are a relatively new phenomenon: for the first time in history these parties had been created along with the changes brought by the democratic transition. With few exceptions, they are now to be found especially in those countries, from the Czech Republic to the Balkans, where Roma live in sufficient numbers and where other minority communities have become successfully mobilized (Vermeersch-Ram 2009: 66). Political parties are usually defined as stable, well-organized and hierarchical structures that integrate, articulate and aggregate interests, and aspire to attain power through elections. Possibly because a significant part of them were not able to field candidates in consecutive elections or to contest the elections at all, and their candidates have rarely been elected to the parliaments, they thus fail to exhibit one of the qualities of coalition or blackmail potential, so generally they do not fall into the category of relevant parties, by making use of G. Sartori's influential distinction.[17]

At first glance, most Roma parties may seem to be loose, office-seeking and far less program-oriented, short-lived proto-parties which lack the ability to become relevant in party competition, and are in many times established shortly before the elections. There were still very few examples in which their candidates could win seats in parliaments (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia), mostly as members of electoral coalitions or competing for the few reserved seats, where provided. Especially in the early 2000s there were attempts in countries like Bulgaria (Crowe 2008: 537), Hungary, Slovakia (Klímová 2002: 116, Vermeersch 2003: 888) and Romania (Rostas 2009: 168) to build electoral coalitions of various Roma organizations. However, fielding candidates, gaining seats and establishing relationships with mainstream parties and the media greatly enabled

quasi-parties are formally classified as civil associations (Rostas 2009: 167). In these two cases, therefore, the paper relies on publications and reports than party registries.

[17] Albeit, as some scholars note about ethnoregional parties, that instead of focusing on national elections it is more common that they contest local and regional elections (Miodownik-Cartrite 2006), and this might be said for Roma parties as well.

some parties to stand out from the Roma party landscape and aspire to dominate the scene for a longer period.[18]

Most of the often-cited definitions of ethnic parties are built on the sociological and ideological perspectives, either based on party origin or voters' support, capturing parties from the bottom, or by focusing, top-down, on the interests that they seek to promote. Horowitz's underlying definition, describing ethnic parties as those who receive overwhelming support from one ethnic group whose interests they serve, while the distribution of group support is of less importance, belongs to the former (1985: 291). Concepts from other authors (Caramani 2012: 819, Bugajski 1995, Chandra 2011, Gunther-Diamond 2003: 183, Lane-Ersson 2005: 114) focus on that such parties aim to represent and mobilize a distinct community by articulating its needs and demands. As to the applicability of these definitions to Roma parties, one can observe that on the supply side, with the exception of Bulgaria, explicit references to the group appear in most party names although they not necessarily seek to promote only Roma interests, and are open especially to the lower segments of the society. On the consumer side, which is more difficult to capture due to privacy and data protection concerns, one might conclude that because of the great social distance between Roma and non-Roma in the region, it is presumably the Roma who support these parties. Many point out that these organizations should not necessarily be parties in legal terms since many of them do not operate on the basis of party laws but participate in the national elections, as it is the case in Romania.

Studies usually underscore that ethnic parties are built on existing client relationships, making less necessary to create fully-developed structures. Because they seek to mobilize and represent only distinct communities, their objectives and strategies are narrower in focus, less aggregative, and usually do not offer programs for the wider society. But if certain part of Roma parties define Roma in social rather than ethnic terms, and aim to combat against poverty, they necessarily have to appeal to a wider circle of voters. Ethnic parties display considerably less ideological and programmatic commitment and a low level of ideological coherence, and instead, they are much more prone to focusing on symbolic issues (Gunther-Diamond 2003: 183-184) and ethnicizing seemingly neutral problems on occasion. The main problem we face is the lack of data on most of the Roma parties since most of them do not have websites, and more importantly, cannot overcome the glass ceiling to appear in the mass

[18] Such as the Roma Civic Initiative (ROI) in Czechoslovakia between 1990-1992, the Roma Party (PR) in Romania from 1992, or the Party for Full Emancipation of Roma (PCER) in Macedonia during the middle of the 1990s.

media. But the assumption seems to be validated that these parties are predominantly run and can be strongly attached to the traditional elite and to their leaders (see e. g., Miscoiu 2006). One might also expect that in their case, unlike national minority parties, purely material issues like the socio-economic integration and well-being are much more or at least equally relevant than symbolic, linguistic and cultural ones.[19] And because of the higher need for redistribution they may be more leftist on economic and social issues.

There have been a wide variety of arguments made why Roma mobilization might be considered as a failure. The literature usually attributes the potential reasons and consequences to group characteristics, most notably to the lack of preconditions for mass political mobilization–pointing out, among others, the lack of broad acceptance of the need to convert the potential social cleavage into political activity–, and, not least, to the institutional and social context. Not only the often cited group heterogeneity itself might account for the electoral failures, but secondly and I think more importantly, the often competing views on how "Roma" and their identities should be conceptualized, how they identify themselves and in addition, for ethnopolitical entrepreneurs which of the components of the available identities seems to be more effective in mobilizing support and the extent to which their appeals resonate with the dominant forms of group identities. For Roma party activists, it is reasonable to secure an electorate that would fit the criteria of sharing some common features and, at the same time, being large enough to gain seats in the parliament, and this greatly depends on the successful reinforcement and construction of identities and their mobilization (Alonso 2007: 86). The inevitable challenge they have to face is that ethnicity-oriented political activism presupposes some notion of group uniformity that they also seek to ultimately achieve during and as a result of their mobilizing efforts. Arguably, group heterogeneity not only makes it difficult to simultaneously appeal to various communities but it is not so conducive to finding and highlighting some common features, too, around which parties can successfully build their mobilization strategies – even if such objective characteristics can be observed even in one country at all besides the fact that most of them live in poverty and have excluded status (Kovats 2013: 106-113).

Therefore, it matters whether party leaders accentuate positive elements, such as historical and cultural traditions, whereby they contribute to strengthen the ethnocultural minority status and to Roma nation-building processes as well, or focus on to remedy the disadvantageous social status and exclusion, give voice to grievances, or seek to mobilize in response to the

[19] As to Slovakia, see for instance: Vermeersch 2003: 891.

perceived threat from the far-right. Given that a significant part of them do not declare themselves as Roma (or as belonging to analogous groups), and statistics also confirm that the differences between census results and their estimated number are usually multiple, however, one might conclude that among the Roma population there is the lack of both the broad recognition and awareness of the cleavage between Roma and non-Roma in society, in at least ethnic terms, and of the widespread need to put ethnic issues and demands from the social sphere on the political agenda. This is further supported by the anthropologist Stewart's finding arguing that Roma social networks are rather based on strong ties of family (2013: 43), while the whole terrain of public issues, an essential prerequisite of public life assumes the need to move beyond these concrete interpersonal relationships and family ties.

In addition, the problem is not only to find some common social and/or ethnic features with which most of the Roma can certainly associate and identify themselves, independently from the judgement of their environment, the outside world.[20] The core problem, however, is that once Roma issues have been shifted to the political level, the long-debated question of who is a Roma no longer can be an abstract category: in principle, Roma leaders and activists who push this agenda need to demonstrate or even construct a somewhat fixed group of supporters or act at least on behalf of an existing or imagined group but in practice they mostly fail to clearly draw boundaries, perhaps being fearful of losing certain parts of the potential electorate (e. g., Vermeersch 2002: 94). And at the decision-making level, when introducing measures and allocating resources to ensure the effectiveness of such policies it is indispensable to have more or less well-defined target groups. But as a consequence of these concerns, political discourses on Roma hardly correspond to social realities (Kovats 2013).

The uncertainty around group membership leads to another difference when compared Roma parties with other ethnopolitical parties in the region, namely to the assumption that in fairly divided societies, members of different ethnic groups will inevitably vote for their own ethnic parties (Chandra 2009: 21), which, considering the overall poor electoral performance of Roma parties, can be also hardly observed in our case. With the exception of few cases such as the Roma Party in Romania which contested the elections several times with declining support, the major difficulty is the relative lack of comparable data since significant part of them did not field candidates in the parliamentary elections at all, or participated in the past elections for only one time.

[20] For the debates on who is a Roma in Hungary, see among others: Babusik 2004.

A further peculiarity of Roma parties is their relatively highly contested nature which can be directly derived from the above. While modernist approaches usually stress the importance of equal chances and human rights, advocates of culturalism put more emphasis on the preservation of culture and traditions (Bíró 2013: 33-34). As to the former one could argue that if Roma are considered as a purely social category referring to a group of people who have mostly limited access to social services and cannot exercise even the basic rights due to poverty and social exclusion, the task, therefore, lies not in pushing for the unity of an imagined Roma community and expecting them to participate in public life like other actors, but instead it is the decision-makers who have the primary responsibility and budget to introduce the necessary measures. Certain variations of this general argument do not inherently preclude the preservation of identities but hold that basic human rights should be prioritized over minority issues. They point out that an ethnic party by its nature runs the risk of ethnicizing any kind of social problems and would not only strengthen the far right but a Roma party may reinforce the impression that these problems overlap significantly and suggests that non-Roma majority has always the ability to improve the situation but does not try at all. By contrast, critics of this approach argue that it not only relies heavily on the state, evoking, in a certain sense, the omnipotent and paternalist nature of the former Communist systems but implies that Roma are portrayed as merely collectively passive and even victims, and therefore, the opponents of this idea stress the importance of the greater involvement of citizens in public affairs. These experts consider it a risk if the complex issues of Roma integration become fragmented in different policies. They further highlight that especially after more than two decades since the transition and even in the times of global financial crisis, it would probably be illusionary to expect only of governments, in a top-down manner, to solve these issues. Further, another dimension of the debate sets the struggle for civic and human rights, the efforts to create the Roma ‘demos’ against the idea of the Roma ‘ethnos’ with ethnocultural priorities, referring either to recognized minority status in the respective states or the project of transnational nation-building.

Dilemmas of Roma responses: the Hungarian example in comparative context

Even before the outbreak of the global financial crisis by which Hungary has been hit hard, the complex and controversial aspects of the desired socio-economic integration of the Roma, the country’s largest minority, were brought to the fore. While there has been a much recent public debate about the goals, methods, failures and results of the integration policy, as well

as on the role of the different actors, this has also provoked local conflicts, led to violence against Roma communities, and especially since the issues related to Roma attracted widespread media attention they contributed to the electoral success of the radical right Jobbik party, too (Bíró-Nagy et al. 2013, Krekó 2013).

In Hungary, according to the census results from 2011, approximately 315 thousands of people declared themselves as Roma, about 3 percent of the total population but their estimated number is at least twice as high. The overwhelming majority is Hungarian-speaking, while the others speak either some variants of Romani or an ancient Romanian dialect, the Beash. In many respects they have to face similar types of challenges in everyday life as other Roma in the region (Bernát 2009). However, the relatively high number of more than 30 Roma political parties established since 1989 is remarkable, particularly since the Hungarian institutional framework can be regarded as rather neutral for ethnic parties. The law on political parties does not recognize the notion of ethnic parties, so does not consider them as separate entities within political parties. Nor does it provide any preferential institutional opportunities for them to be represented but it has been prohibited for political parties, thus for ethnic parties too, to run candidates at the elections of minority self-governments (bodies of the non-territorial autonomy system). Pursuant to the new electoral laws, which, contrary to the former, are now directed to strongly encourage creating political parties and nominating candidates by their new rules on fielding candidates and campaign finance, Roma political parties are not entitled to obtain the newly established preferential minority seats in the parliament, too. Between 1990 and 2014 only eight of them were able to field at least one candidate in at least one of the parliamentary elections, but they all failed to win mandates.

The analysis of the news from the Hungarian News Agency (MTI) and other online news portals between 2008 and 2014 also validates that as to the Hungarian case, it is fairly obvious that for Roma, since the early 1990s civil organizations and minority self-governments have been the dominant forms of organizations. Their parties have remained marginal political actors, although and especially during election campaigns, when they usually activate themselves, they receive greater media coverage, and their events and messages tend to occupy more space in the news. In addressing the major research question of whether redistribution and/or recognition issues are more likely to characterize their claims, two main conclusions can be drawn: 1) although issues related to redistribution and social inclusion were present, several well-formulated party programs proposed measures to improve the

situation in the fields of housing, health care, education, and employment[21], responses were put forward to the challenges that have emerged, partly because of the outbreak of the financial crisis and the controversial social reforms introduced especially by the second Orbán government (about the latter see Szikra 2014), 2) greater emphasis was put on drawing attention and raising public awareness about the challenge that the rise of the far-right has posed.[22] In the latter context, parties almost exclusively raised concerns and emphasized the need to counterbalance or to eliminate the threat or reduce it. Certain parties had even explained that they were going to contest the elections strongly because they intended to fight against discrimination and counter the far right.[23] Several party leaders called for the liquidation of the Hungarian Guard (Magyar Gárda)[24], organized marches and services in churches against the extremists[25], objected some of the anti-Roma statements, and apprehended prominent radical right leaders, Jobbik party leaders.[26]

[21] MCF Roma Unity Party (MTI, 23 March 2010, in Hungarian). The 2010 Action Plan of the Hungarian Solidarity Party. http://szolidaritaspart.mindenkilapja.hu/ (accessed 21 April 2011, in Hungarian). The 2014 Electoral Programme of the Democratic Party for the Well-Being of European Christian Roma (3 February 2014, in Hungarian). eurompart.bloglap.hu (accessed 27 February 2014). The 2014 Electoral Programme of the Hungarian Gypsy Party (Cpress, 26 February 2014, in Hungarian). http://c-press.hu/2014022610805/belfold/elkeszult-a-magyarorszagi-cigany-part-26-pontbol-allo-valasztasi-programja.html (accessed 27 February 2014).

[22] See in this respect also Roma Union offices vandalized (b92, 8 October 2008) http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2008&mm=05&dd=30&nav_id=50670 (accessed 6 February 2014). Far-right group mobilises; Slovak Roma express fear (The Slovak Spectator, 6 August 2009) http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/36149/2/far_right_group_mobilises_slovak_roma_express_fear.html (accessed 26 August 2014). Anti-Roma Demonstrations Spread Across Bulgaria (Sofia News Agency, 28 September 2011) http://www.novinite.com/articles/132482/Anti-Roma+Demonstrations+Spread+Across+Bulgaria (accessed 30 October 2014). Bulgarian Roma Party Fear Blast Was Ethnically Motivated (Sofia News Agency, 30 June 2012) http://www.novinite.com/articles/140827/Bulgarian+Roma+Party+Fear+Blast+Was+Ethnically+Motivated (accessed 30 October 2014).

[23] Unity for Equality Party (Cpress, 5 March 2009, in Hungarian). http://portal.c-press.hu/200903054436/belfold/kulon-ep-listaban-gondolkodik-kozak-mert-o-kulonb-tevesen-jeloltek-meg-kolompar-partjat.html (accessed 6 March 2009).

[24] Party of Minorities in Hungary (Stop.hu, 9 July 2009, in Hungarian). http://www.stop.hu/articles/article.php?id=515882#null (accessed 9 July 2009).

[25] Democratic Party for the Well-Being of European Christian Roma (21 October 2012, in Hungarian). http://www.romnet.hu/programok/2012/10/21/az_europai_roma_keresztenyek_jobbleteert_demokratikus_part__es_a_heves_megyei_roma_nemzetisegi_onkormanyzat (accessed 29 October 2012). Similar actions, including peaceful demonstrations and blockades were organized in other countries, too, most notably in Bulgaria and in the Czech Republic. See Bulgaria's Euroroma Threatens Blockades on Major Roads (Sofia News Agency, 22 July 2014) http://www.novinite.com/articles/162171/Bulgaria%27s+Euroroma+Threatens+Blockades+on+Major+Roads (accessed 30 October 2014). Roma Protesters Block Three Trains in Bulgaria's Sofia (Sofia News Agency, 29 July 2014). http://www.novinite.com/articles/162327/Roma+Protesters+Block+Three+Trains+in+Bulgaria%27s+Sofia (accessed 30 October 2014). Czech Republic: "Colourful Ostrava" to counter-demonstrate against neo-Nazis on state holiday (Romea.cz, 22 October 2013) http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-republic-colorful-ostrava-to-counter-demonstrate-against-neo-nazis-on-state-holiday (accessed 30 October 2014).

[26] Democratic Party for the Well-Being of European Christian Roma (Cpress, 3 November 2012, in Hungarian). http://c-press.hu/201211039704/belfold/feljelentes-vona-gabor-ellen-emberolesre-valo-felbujtasert.html (accessed 29 November 2013). See also Bulgarian Roma Party Demands Nationalist Leader's Arrest (Sofia News Agency, 29 September 2011) http://www.novinite.com/articles/132517/Bulgarian+Roma+Party+Demands+Nationalist+Leader%27s+Arrest (accessed 30 October 2014). Roma party urges Slovak National Party to remove billboards (The Slovak Spectator, 9 February 2012) http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/45310/10/roma_party_urges_slovak_national_party_to_remove_billboards.html (accessed 26 August 2014).

As argued in the previous theoretical chapters, for the party image, policy goals and mobilization strategies it is a decisive factor how the parties and their potential voters identify and portray themselves, how they draw boundaries and whether they consider the ethnic and social elements of identities as particular values and resources. Based on their goals and statements, most of the Roma parties identify the Roma as one of the national and ethnic minorities in Hungary. Only one party advocated the idea of the transnational nation-building. Their names contain both terms 'Roma' and 'Gypsy', although the latter is rather related to 21st century parties. They refer to efforts aiming at uniting and integrating Roma by using the words 'unity' or 'union', or at least in their names aim to cover the entire country. Therefore, with a few exceptions that tend to advocate the interests of only certain subgroups, there is hardly any reference to the internal divisions among the Roma; their common goal is to achieve better political representation at various levels. As to the objectives laid down in the party statutes, as a general rule, they simultaneously outline both the ethnocultural issues like the preservation of minority identity and the basic requirements for socio-economic integration. Those parties that addressed socio-economic integration in more detail, placed emphasis on the struggle against unemployment and discrimination, the promotion of social inclusion and the improvement of living standards. Interestingly, Roma parties in Hungary tend to clearly position themselves ideologically, but the statutes do not allow a direct conclusion on the parties' actual position in the party system or on their relations to mainstream political parties and governments. Generally, until the millennium liberal and left-wing political parties could potentially benefit from Roma parties, while in the 2000s they tended to become more right-wing oriented. After one less successful attempt to unite some Roma parties in 2001, the rapprochement and cooperation with mainstream forces offered new and greater perspectives, but they proved to be less attractive for parliamentary parties compared to Roma civic organizations.

Conclusions

Roma political parties in Central and South Eastern Europe have been relatively stable, yet marginal and disputed actors in the party systems since the transition and have failed to reach and genuinely mobilize their potential voters, whose identities and demands arguably do not correspond with the party images and goals. Therefore, at first glance, this conclusion seems to be drawn that although there is a more or less obvious, group-constituting social cleavage of which members and non-members are somewhat aware, as it can be demonstrated by

census data, and as the logic of various policies and the claims by the far right go some way toward demarcating a group under the label of Roma, and further, Roma parties confirm that there is a certain, rather limited need for the cleavage to be transformed and expressed at political level, the often weak and uncertain ethnic ties hardly correspond with voting demands. When furthering the analysis, it could be also demonstrated that, even though, Roma have received national or ethnic minority status throughout the region, and consequently, their parties are typically viewed as ethnic parties, but given the uncertainties around group membership, the problematic and contested nature of defining and identifying the "Roma" as a social group facing crucial socio-economic challenges, as a minority focusing on the preservation and development of distinct ethnocultural identities in their homelands, or as a 'nation without a state' having an eye on the European level, Roma parties may adopt different mobilization strategies, and even without the intention to precisely draw the boundaries of their target group. Besides the often cited factors, like the lack of capacity to reach and mobilize their voters, this might also contribute to their electoral failure. So it is not simply about that Roma parties have to face both their own inadequate capacities and the potential voters' reluctance to vote for them but it may seem obvious to suggest, but it needs to be supported by further case studies, that these parties refer to ethnicity only in their names but in fact it is a far less important aspect in party programs and policy objectives when compared to social and economic issues.

The present analysis of mapping Roma party responses to recent challenges, whether and how they have been affecting Roma party politics, especially in Hungary, also illustrated the compound relationship between the claims for recognition and redistribution in the case of Roma and pointed out that the former does not necessarily involve the need to preserve distinct ethnocultural identities, it rather refers to the struggle against discrimination, stigmatization, and the far-right challenge.

Therefore, there is the need to assess the relatively new phenomena of Roma parties on their own terms, and with particular emphasis on how they can contribute constructively to greater citizens' involvement. But taking into account their marginal position, one can hardly expect, at the present moment, that it will be the political parties that will have enough support and capacity to effectively influence policies and improve the overall situation. Nevertheless, the claim to win mandates by way of a Roma (ethnic) party is legitimate in democracy and competitive party systems where each social interest can freely enter the open market of political ideas. Particularly since the experiences gathered and the results achieved by other

possible institutional channels, including civil organizations, minority self-governments, round-tables, consultative bodies, reserved seats, and representation through generic political parties, overall, have proved to be limited and far from the expected, as it can be demonstrated by the recent need to adopt national strategies on Roma inclusion in the EU.

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